

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LILONG 00430 211612Z

ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 ORM-02 SCS-03 SCA-01 SY-05

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /067 W

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R 211355Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY LILONGWE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 734

INFO AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, MI

SUBJECT: RECENT RELEASES OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES FROM PRISON CAMP

1. LAST WEEK THRU MALAWIAN SOURCES WE LEARNED THAT A NUMBER OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES HAD RECENTLY BEEN RELEASED AFTER SERVING 16 MONTHS OF 2-YEAR SENTENCES. THIS MORNING I HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO RAISE SUBJECT WITH SECRETARY TO PRESIDENCY, JOHN NGWIRI, CITING THE INCREASED INTEREST AND CONCERN OF OUR NEW ADMINISTRATION IN THE SUBJECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE WIDESPREAD PUBLICITY THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES HAVE GIVEN TO THEIR SITUATION IN MALAWI. HE REMARKED THAT HE IS AWARE OF NEW EMPHASIS FROM MENTION OF IT MADE IN CONNECTION WITH OUR REFUSAL TO CONSIDER APPROVAL OF MALAWI FOR FMS. HE THEN WENT ON TO ADD THAT OVER 200 JW'S WERE RELEASED IN FEBRUARY AND HAVE RETURNED TO THEIR VILLAGES; TYAT MUCH TO HIS SURPRISE AND RELIEF THEY HAVE NOT CAUSED ANY PROBLEMS THRU AGITATION OR DEFIANCE OF LAWS OR VILLAGE NORMS; AND THAT THIS "SUCCESS" HE ATTRIBUTES TO CAREFUL PRIOR PREPARATION OF THE HOME VILLAGES TO RCEIVE THESE PEOPLE IN A FRIENDLY, COOPERATIVE MANNER AND TO GIVE THEM ANOTHER CHANCE. HE REMARKED THAT JW'S HAVE NORMALLY BEEN ARRESTED ON CHARGES OF DISTURBING THE PEACE BECAUSE THEIR REFUSALS TO SING THE NATIONAL ANTHEM, TO SALUTE THE FLAG, TO PAY TAXES, TO BUY PARTY CARDS, TO SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO SCHOOL, ETC., AND

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PAGE 02 LILONG 00430 211612Z

THEIR ZEALOUS PROSELYTIZING OF THEIR BELIEFS FREQUENTLY ANGER THE OTHER VILLAGERS AND DISTURBANCE RESULT.

2. NGWIRI OBSERVED THAT THE JW'S ARE MODEL PRISONERS -- "IT IS PART OF THEIR BELIEF THAT TO GO TO PRISON FOR THEIR CAUSE IS THE SHORTEST WAY TO HEAVEN" -- AND THAT THEY ALMOST ALWAYS EAR A REMISSION OF SENTENCE FOR GOOD BEHAVIOR WHICH IS 4 MONTHS PER YEAR

AND THAT SINCE MOST RECEIVED 2-YEAR SENTENCES THEY GOT OUT AFTER 16 MONTHS. SINCE FEBRUARY, HE SAID, MANY OTHERS HAVE BEEN RELEASED AND IF EVERYTHING DOES ALONG AS SMOOTHLY AS IT IS NOW VIRTUALLY ALL THOSE HELD WILL SOON BE FREE. HE EXPRESSED HIS STRONG WISH THAT THIS WILL BE THE OUTCOME AND VOICED THE WORRY THAT "IF THEY AGITATE AND CAUSE TROUBLE AGAIN THEY WILL BE SENTENCED AS REPEAT OFFENDERS WHICH WILL AUTOMATICALLY MEAN MUCH LONGER TERMS".

3. I COMPLIMENTED NGWIRI ON THE FORESIGHT SHOWN IN PREPARATION OF THE VILLAGERS TO RECEIVE THE RELEASED PRISONERS, AND TOLD HIM I WAS VERY PLEASED TO HEAR OF THE RELEASES AND HOPE WITH HIM THAT FUTURE PROBLEMS CAN BE AVOIDED.
STEVENSON

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